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"A Day for Us to Mourn": Unsettling Performances of Marikana

Sofie de Smet and Marieke Breyne

ABSTRACT Introduction On the 16th of August 2012 thirty-four Lonmin miners lost their lives at Marikana in South Africa. They were killed by the police who—after failed, ignored, or impeded negotiations with the striking miners—were assigned by the Lonmin Board of Directors and the mining unions to demobilize and dismantle the striking mass present at the [...]

Introduction

On the 16th of August 2012 thirty-four Lonmin miners lost their lives at Marikana in South Africa. They were killed by the police who—after failed, ignored, or impeded negotiations with the striking miners—were assigned by the Lonmin Board of Directors and the mining unions to demobilize and dismantle the striking mass present at the Marikana area. The Marikana event, as a traumatic culmination of distorted socioeconomic power, demonstrated that South Africa's road to resolving conflict, structural inequality, and injustice still remains to be traveled. It demonstrated that organized violence, as it was previously conducted under apartheid, is still operative in the new South Africa's globalized state within the context of rising transnational neoliberalism in Africa. This state of affairs has, in turn, led numerous theatre makers to take up this shocking event, which is now known as the "Marikana massacre." The site-specific performances *Mari and Kana* (2015) and *Iqhiya Emnyama* (2015), presented in the heart of Cape Town, question and re-examine existing power systems and the problematic structural injustice at the heart of the massacre.

Every South African autumn, Cape Town's buzzing city center is transformed into an art scene through the annual public arts festival, *Infecting the City*. This festival, which welcomed more than fifty productions and 290 artists during its latest edition in March 2015, is praised for its efforts to democratize art via a well-considered, multifaceted program and wide-reaching audience scope. From its earliest edition in 2008, at that time directed by Jay Pather and Brett Bailey, the festival invited an equal number of artists from the inner city of Cape Town and artists from the surrounding townships to participate. As all productions are free, (semi-)public, and take place in the heart of Cape Town, the festival attracts a very heterogeneous audience varying from artists to students to tourists to beggars. Only 19% of the festival's artists are international guests. In this respect, a significant number of performances at the festival are anchored in contemporary South Africa which is easily inflammable and marked by corruption. Such an embeddedness generates critical debates among myriad, multi-cultural voices each year.

The performances *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, presented at *Infecting the City* 2015, take the Marikana killings as a starting point. *Mari and Kana* is a production of

South African theatre maker Mandisi Sindo and his company Theatre4Change Therapeutic Theatre (T3) in close collaboration with the company Lingua Franca Spoken Word Movement, based in the township Khayelitsha. On the playbill of *Infecting the City* 2015, *Mari and Kana* is announced as a journey of two young men who provisionally leave prison to attend a Xhosa ceremony around the graves of their fathers. In line with Sindo's theatre oeuvre, *Mari and Kana* combines elements of traditional Xhosa ritual, contemporary dance, opera, poetry, live percussion, and visual imagery.¹ *Iqhiya Emnyama*, a performance that also premiered at *Infecting the City* 2015, was created by Cindy Mkaza-Siboto. Mkaza-Siboto is a director specialized in physical theatre, storytelling, and object theatre. As a performative exploration of grief, *Iqhiya Emnyama* (Xhosa for black cloth or *doekie* in Afrikaans) draws attention to the relation between the mourning widow and the black cloth. Both performances took place on the same evening and in the same public area of Cape Town, namely the Company Garden. Known for its neat gardens with impressively curled trees, the Garden is a touristic hot spot that never lost its authentic urban character due to the rushing business people, strolling couples, curious squirrels, and soldiers-on-exercise who cross its paths.

This essay offers a reflection on the particular transformative power of *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*. Both performances provide an opportunity for a participatory and reflective encounter between the audience members, the site, and the performers. The performances call for justice in afro-neoliberal² South Africa through their emphasis on the ones who were left behind after the media disappeared, the commission's report was published, and the strikers went back to work: the widows of the thirty-four killed Lonmin miners. Focusing on the individual bodily daily practice of the women, the performances dismantle the dominant, mediatized discourse of commemoration of the Marikana killings. They elicit a reflection on the value of representing the daily life-struggle of the mourning women against inhumanity and socioeconomic inequality in a neoliberal South Africa. Through the public act of mourning, the performances subvert the hierarchy of grievability and, hence, pose a challenge to political authority. Unsettling the ubiquity of resilient subjects on which neoliberal subjectivity is built, the omnipresence of vulnerability in the two performances nurtures a process of rethinking structural justice. Furthermore, the performances enact alternative identities in public space through the subversion of the constructed category of "the mourning South Africa woman." We conclude that both performances entail unique driving forces that question existing power systems and the problematic structural injustice at the heart of the massacre. They function as interventions into "leveraging justice" for the miners, and especially their widows.

In what follows, we first describe the performances as we experienced them, and then analyze their context, including the strategic memory produced by the government and the hegemonic weight of the places of performance. We then move to the resistance of the mourning women in performance, resistance to both the role of widows in South African culture and also to the concept of resilience that becomes, under neoliberalism, a fetishized coping mechanism exonerating the state of responsibility for the women's well-being and recovery.

Mourning in the Company Garden

On the evening of the festival's performances of *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, one of the first things the audience notices is the transformation of the Company Garden into a graveyard with small white crosses. Via their inherent religious character, these crosses mark the scene of acts of the public performance *Mari and Kana*. The expanding audience, searching for a seat around an absent stage, remains at a respectful distance from the graves. Referring to the widespread image of the graveyard at Wonderkop Koppie (the

rocky hill where the strikers gathered), these white crosses install a distinctive atmosphere. Words such as “mineworkers” and “Marikana” are whispered throughout the gathered crowd and some people explicitly request silence. This graveyard-scene seems to produce an instantly respectful attitude and stimulates emotional dynamics.

As soon as the audience has gathered around the graveyard, two musicians in working clothes start to play a repetitive tune. One does not realize the impact of the hypnotizing sound until a drum briefly slips out of the musician’s hand and the beat is interrupted. This haunting soundscape will last throughout the performance, strengthened by the voices of two female choir members carrying white umbrellas. Suddenly, however, a car drives up and two policemen roughly drag two young prisoners on stage and remove their handcuffs. Although the presence of the policemen and the men in orange prison suits is impressive, our attention is continuously drawn to two women near to the audience. Sitting with stretched legs on the gravel and turning their eyes on the ground, these women slowly perform a dance of simple mourning gestures. They light a small fire at the foot of a cross and then walk around and pray next to the cross. The prayer gestures enlarge and become expressive movements of despair. Combined with a heart-breaking lament and a mirrored dance by the two young prisoners in the background, the performance becomes a choreography of pain and grief.

The roles of mothers and sons are clarified through the interactions between the women and the men. The two sons called Mari and Kana hold their mothers during their lament while the mothers hold their sons in an attempt to bathe them. In contrast to the women, the two young men also challenge each other physically through a play-fight in bare torso. Only once do they arrange themselves all in one line, alternating grief gestures with a military step on the spot.

Every movement is enriched by the continuous singing of the choir. The lament is interrupted by poetry fragments and exclamations of the real names of the dead Marikana mineworkers. When the song *Vuka Mntomnyana* (translated as “Wake up Blackman”) softens and the dark night falls over the Garden, the audience realizes the performance is over, though the presence of the remaining white crosses and the indelible sounds hold the performance’s affect long after the applause.

Subsequently, a festival guide invites the spectators to move on to the next performance in the Company Garden. Following a video work and a performance of two comedians, three women, almost unnoticeable, appear in the audience. They stand out due to their long black clothes, similar to the clothes worn by the women in *Mari and Kana*. These women drag along a big mattress and slowly make their way through the crowd. The crowd, still filled with shaking laughter from the previous comic cabaret-show, swarms extensively and noisy around the silent women. The women, however, keep their slow pace and serene expressions, walking perfectly in line down to the Government Avenue. When the women meet a fourth woman with a mattress and a seated fifth performer, who plays traditional Xhosa instruments, all spectators understand that they reached the site of the last performance of that evening, entitled *Iqhiya Emnyama*. The audience finds a standing or seating position. The four women place themselves in the middle of the crowd and lay down their mattresses. What follows is the presentation of visually associated fragments of mourning customs. The women cover themselves in black cloths and sit in freeze-poses on the piled mattresses. They circle around the mattresses and use them as walls of an improvised house. Daily customs such as making a lunchbox and drinking tea are combined with abstract gestures of pain, despair, and disgust. The women sing, cry, and loudly shout out their pain. Finally, they rip off their black cloths and take off their shoes followed by a re-enactment of a protest march on the mattresses. At the end, the repeated words “A piece of me died that night” announce a burial ritual, in which the

performers invite the audience to participate. A prayer song is initiated, immediately responded to by the audience singing along. With this song, the full-evening program in the Company Garden ends. In sum, the spectator at *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* co-creates with the performers rituals of mourning and grief. These rituals moreover take place in a politically-burdened urban landscape. In what follows, we argue that these performances tackle racial, spatial, and gender-based patterns of inequality at the backdrop of neoliberalism in post-apartheid South Africa. Before we analyze the performances' aesthetics in regard to their ethical imperatives, the affinity of the actual South African government with the neoliberal body of thought needs to be unpacked.

Critics have argued that the transition towards a neoliberal post-apartheid state favored a small, new, ruling black elite, and the old beneficiaries of the apartheid regime, as after 1994 "they were cementing their alliance with the corporate raiders in the advanced capitalist world."³ At the heart of governmental economic policy, profound contradictions are found. On the one hand the African National Congress' (ANC) revolutionary principles and responsibility towards the poor and the working class are reflected in their pro-poor rhetoric and social programs. On the other hand, the ANC government permitted massive capital flight that increased significantly since the end of apartheid, maintained high interest rates, and cut the budget deficit. A loss of capital leads to a loss of investments, which in its turn influences the unemployment and inequality rates and "the ongoing failure to confront the legacy of the apartheid past."⁴

After the defeat of apartheid, the South African government integrated the country into the global economy primarily as a mining exporter heavily reliant on foreign capital inflows. Pro-capitalist economic policies further subjected the South African mining industry to the rule of transnational capital and free markets. As part of a global economy, South Africa has to meet the need for flexibility in work conditions. Since the democratic transition, employment has for example largely shifted from direct employment towards third parties, and from lifelong employment towards temporary.⁵ In order to maximize profit and minimize risks, mining work has become increasingly fragmented, paving the way for precarious work conditions. Furthermore, by stimulating contract employment and third party employment, union organizations, and labor movements that fight against exploitation are being weakened.⁶ The precariousness of the miners' working conditions is mirrored by the poor living conditions in the informal settings where a myriad of the miners live. These informal settings are characterized by a lack of basic facilities such as running water and electricity, and a lack of safety. The multinational Lonmin Company, the third largest producers of platinum in the world, acknowledged that a great number of the surrounding inhabitants of its mines live in informal settings. Specifically in Rustenburg, a municipality area located one-hundred kilometers from Johannesburg, the so called "hub of the world platinum mining production,"⁷ formal housing of the mining communities has even decreased from 47% to 42% between 2001 and 2007, indicating the precarious conditions of the workforce.

Strategic Mourning

After August 2012 the above-mentioned words "Lonmin" and "Rustenburg" are hardly spoken without referring to the miners' strike at Marikana. The strike resulted in the largest state massacre of South African citizens since the Soweto Uprising in 1976. The police gunfire was without a doubt the immediate cause of the Marikana massacre. Nonetheless, critics have fundamentally questioned the objectivity of NUM (the National Union of Mineworkers) and its collaboration with Lonmin's management, as well as the responsibility of the government in this tragic event.⁸ According to Vishwas Satgar, "The Marikana massacre affirms this reality and the willingness of ruling elites to go beyond

market mechanisms to the point that state violence is utilized to maintain and manage a deeply globalized economy.”²

A locus of thoughtful critique in this essay is the so-called “strategic memory” induced by the government and media. It is arguable that the role of “a particular purpose as part of a strategic political project,”¹⁰ is profoundly apparent in the government’s reaction to the massacre. The following words come from President Zuma’s statement on the Marikana Lonmin mine workers’ tragedy on August 17, 2012: “However, today is not an occasion for blame, finger-pointing or recrimination. [...] as I said, this is not a day to apportion blame. It is a day for us to mourn together as a nation.”¹¹ The government’s first reaction to the Marikana massacre involved two practices that are here considered as components of such a strategic memory: the enforcement of one week of silent mourning, and the formation of the Marikana Commission of Inquiry. By doing so, the government seemed to instantly create a vacuum of alternatives and responsibilities in order to construct a suitable “narrative”¹² for this tragic event. In the wake of Marikana the South African government strongly repudiated any comparison with analogous massacres from the apartheid era. Still, haunting images from the past spread like wildfire; images of “singing protesters dancing in the faces of uniformed, well-armed police, followed by shots and slowly settling dust.”¹³ More importantly, the government seemed to neglect not only the comparisons to tragic events such as the Soweto Uprising and Sharpeville massacre, ubiquitous on social media, but also to the continuous historical economic struggles that resulted in massive laborers’ strikes in the twentieth century. The official narrative has a tendency to reduce the massacre to a tragedy that simply should be mourned on all sides. This discourse is mirrored by a literal denial when government spokespersons consequently describe Marikana as a “tragedy” and refuse to describe Marikana as a “massacre.”¹⁴

This rhetoric seems to restrict the event to an act of nature comparable to a tornado or a hurricane without a responsible actor. Violence was unquestionably present on both sides, but only the unruly strikers were portrayed and commemorated as violent actors. As Alexander et al., observe: “The consciousness of South Africans and others has been scarred by media footage that makes it seem like strikers were charging the police,” who were by all means merely “defending themselves against savages.”¹⁵ This discourse was followed by the heavy presence of military and police at Marikana while the government openly assured international investors that mining investments in South Africa are very secure. In the aftermath of Marikana 270 mine workers were initially charged with murder. In 2015, three years after the massacre, president Zuma responded to a student’s question about the use of violence as follows: “Those people in Marikana had killed people and the police were stopping them from killing people.”¹⁶ Even years later and after the official report of the commission was published, the initial strategic image of the violent mine worker becomes continuously reinforced by a sole focus on the clash between the police and the violent mine workers. This strategic memory does not touch upon the continuous struggle that the remaining mine workers and the families of the dead miners undergo.

In contemporary South African political life, with its neoliberal agenda, this strategic narrative and its specific mechanisms of power reveal the attempts for a “differential distribution of grievability”¹⁷ in public life. Judith Butler shines a light on grievability as a fundamental presupposition for a life or subject that matters: “Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed.”¹⁸ The dominant public representation of Marikana and their miners

reproduces and regulates the events in such a way that the population tends to remain ungrievable.

Sharing Mourning through Performance

Mari and Kana and *Iqhiya Emnyama* challenge the dominant strategic memory practices. Both performances unsettle and interrogate politically-induced conditions of grievability by creating a public mourning ritual that encourages audience members to bodily engage and participate in grieving. *Mari and Kana* is an immersive creation. Encountering the naturalistic set-up of the crosses and the haunting soundscape, the audience is from the very start absorbed into the emotional journey of the performers even before their appearance. In the beginning the dramatis personae of the dead mine workers, the fathers of the prisoners, are the only ones present. These two static figures with white-painted faces form an immobile part of the performance's backdrop throughout the performance. Their particular presence generates a peculiar tension as these figures operate as both the spirits of the people mourned during the staged ritual and as vibrant characters on scene. This tension, climaxing in the calling out of the real names of the lost mine workers, seems to facilitate the audiences' engagement with the intended grief ritual as the tension shields the ritual from an ultimate cathartic closure or completeness. Indeed, James Thompson notes that "rather than taming the past in a strategic project, performance can maintain its difficultness, its incompleteness, in the present."¹⁹

Various all-sensory ritual mourning acts are performed, such as, for example, blowing ash over the crosses. The intended ritual is, however, primarily created by the incredible energetic bodies of the performers. Their close-up and at times explosive bodily expressions of grief, enveloped by the non-stop singing, continuously contribute to the creation of a shared emotional state of despair. Audience and performers literally share their crying. This state of affairs at the same time enables and defines the ritual. In contrast to the government, which strategically plays upon grief as a tool of closure, these performances display an ongoing harmful grief that seems to unite, even beyond every particular tragic event, the gathered mourners.

Similarly, in *Iqhiya Emnyama* the ritual is shaped and legitimized by an intended and literal sharing of grief. As Mkaza-Siboto elucidates in an interview: "I wanted to orchestrate a ritual for the public to be able to participate in the mourning, because not all of us could afford to go the place of the massacre or the funeral."²⁰ Through the highly mediatized circulation of an image of a man in a green blanket, the mine workers of Marikana have come to be strongly associated with this item. The theatrical object (green blanket) in *Iqhiya Emnyama* personifies the mine workers and becomes a supportive and highly symbolic element in the performance, which marks the performer as a mine worker, but then transforms into the object of murder itself—as the blanket is cut into pieces. The blanket remains visible throughout the performance and in this regard, the audience and the performers continue to share the focal point of their grieving.

Furthermore, the slow and repetitive sound, mostly produced by a single traditional Xhosa instrument, generates an effect of shared trance in one enclosed auditory cosmos. In contrast, the urgent rhythms and the energetic bawling of the women are accompanied by a dramatic howling wind. This fortuitous wind not only dramatizes the grief, it also seems to authenticate it and deepen the uniqueness of the moment of sharing. The wind underlines the temporal character of the performance, the consciousness of the ephemeral and unique shared presence of the performers, spectators, and surroundings.

At the end of the performance, this sharing is consolidated when some audience members are asked to engage in a burial ritual and throw earth on the grave portrayed by the torn green blanket. As the first tones of a prayer meeting song are launched, a number of

spectators start to sing alone, roar out “amen,” clap and dance. Some of them close their eyes and others fold their hands or embrace the persons nearby. Through these actions, the performance calls for corporeal co-presence, a responsiveness and performativity on behalf of the spectator, and consequently a sharing of the mourning ritual. Moreover, throughout the performance of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the spectator is standing, sitting, and walking together with the performers in the Company Garden. In this respect, the full participation of the spectator’s body “allows for a heightened receptiveness to corporeal responses,”²¹ and provides the spectator with a “subliminal element of performativity.”²²

In the spirit of Antigone’s public mourning for her brother, the widows of the Marikana miners chose openly to grieve the death of their husbands, highlighting the fraught nature of hierarchy in grievability. Reacting to the highly controlled regimes of power, the widows’ open grieving designates expressions of outrage, and as Butler writes, “outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential.”²³ Butler allocates political potential to the disruptive character of the act of public mourning itself as it troubles the order and hierarchy of political authority. Both performances as performative public mourning rituals in the Company Garden shape such interventions into the actual debate on the Marikana massacre. The disruptive character is complicated further as the real names of the deceased Marikana workers are called in the performative landscape that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction.

The audience’s awareness of the site is continuously increased in both performances as the spectator is invited to participate, to make choices, to react, and to respond. The embodied encounter with the site in which the spectator is activated as a “co-creator of meaning,”²⁴ promotes awareness of and “response-ability”²⁵ to the political significance beyond the performance. Through the temporary transformation of the Company Garden into a place of performance, the spectator becomes part of a transcendental world. Victoria Hunter argues that through such a process of transcendence, the spectator’s “present-ness” is even more developed “in a world in which the rules of engagement and behaviour are momentarily disrupted enabling a freeing-up of behaviors, actions, and possible interventions.”²⁶

In Dialogue in a Co-Transformed Public Space

More than anything, the self-revelatory experience of the spectator/participant in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, which challenges the individual to reflect physically and conceptually, takes place in a politically-charged urban landscape. In *Mari and Kana*, the audience encounters the widows and the spirits of miners precisely in front of the South African Museum. Although the museum is never directly highlighted by performative interactions or technical effects, its presence is primary. As the spectators watch the mourning women and hear the echoing of the real mineworkers’ names, the museum remains immovably present. The museum itself is strongly associated with its exhibition of the Bushmen, the indigenous inhabitants of southern Africa, that reduced them to “physical types,” of a “primitive race.”²⁷ In this respect, the site of the South African Museum carries its history with it as an “animating absence in the present,”²⁸ and continues to embody the realm of social injustice during apartheid and beyond. Essentially, the spectator as political witness feels “exactly what it is to be in this place at this time.”²⁹ The audience members are obliged to navigate in this political landscape, in which the museum assumes responsibility as a third actor and a “governmental advocate.”³⁰

At the start of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the audience members are positioned as active pedestrians on the Government Avenue. Once the audience has eventually arrived at the venue of the performance, each individual finds themselves between the performing

women and the South African Parliament. “We are literally bringing our baggage in front of the parliament, and they have to deal with it,” explains director Mkaza-Siboto.³¹ The audience’s attention is irrevocably directed towards the government and its ambiguous position in the Marikana massacre—a position that is neither clarified nor purified by the delayed publication of the investigative report of the Inquiry Commission of Marikana. The spectators function in the site-world as the physical joints between the performance and the parliament. Consequently, they are called upon to act and respond while assuming responsibility as South African citizens and, moreover, agents of social justice. In sum, both performances deliberately stimulate the audience members to reflect on what they see, hear, and do in relationship to their experiences in the (political) world.

In what follows, we would like to highlight that these spaces in both performances are above all created through the presence of performing women, the ones who are left behind at Marikana trying to survive and continue their lives under disastrous economic conditions. In this regard, the performances tackle the particularly problematic, gendered dimensions of the Marikana massacre and entail remarkable messages in gendered-subtext within a general neoliberal discourse. The performance sites could be considered as “invented spaces,” defined by Faranak Miraftab as “the spaces occupied by the grassroots that confront the authorities and the status quo, in the hope for a larger societal change.”³² Miraftab considers these spaces as a necessary refinement of the feminist project of citizenship.

Afterwards: Post-Marikana Resistance to Resilience

In the words of a Marikana widow:

Actually, who ordered the police to kill our husbands, was it Lonmin? Or, was it the government that signed that the police must kill our husbands? Today I am called a widow and my children are called fatherless because of the police. I blame the mine, the police and the government because they are the ones who control this country. [...] Our future is no more and I feel very hopeless because I do not know who will educate my children. My husband never made us suffer. He was always providing for us. The government has promised us that they will support us for three months with groceries, but they only gave us three things: 12.5 kg of mealie meal, 12.5 kg of flour and 12.5 kg of samp. That’s it.³³

This testimony displays the disastrous conditions in the households of the Marikana widows. *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* focus specifically on this daily life struggle in the aftermath. This performative struggle is however not represented by resilient subjects, but by genuinely vulnerable subjects. The ethos of resilience as part of the moral code for neoliberal subjects has been hotly debated in the last decade in the social sciences. This criticism calls into question how resilience might divert attention from state intervention and how it might be (ab)used in policy thinking by focusing on individual adaptation to adversity. At the price of denying vulnerability, the ubiquity of the strong support for resilient subjects that “act as rational agents within market-governed contexts,” and are “capable of organizing their collective wellbeing”³⁴ barely hides a neoliberal undertone. Resilience implicitly suggests acceptance, endorsement, and the fact that “there is no alternative.”³⁵ In the context of the Marikana massacre, we denote such a lack of alternative in the dominant tendency to reduce the massacre to a tragedy. In the president’s statement on Marikana we perceive a strong collective exhortation towards “overcoming” such challenges as the South African society did in the past in order to uphold the nation’s progress:

We have gone through painful moments before, and were able to overcome such challenges through coming together as a nation, regardless of race, colour, creed or political affiliations. We must use that national trait again during this difficult period. Most importantly, we will not be derailed from the progress we have made as a country since 1994. We will continue with our task of consolidating our hard-won freedom and democracy. And we will continue working tirelessly, to build a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa.³⁶

The tendency to over-emphasize resilience in an afro-neoliberal economy such as that in South Africa undermines the possibility of substantial transformation while the statistics cry out for more inherent re-thinking of social relationships in the ANC-guided neoliberal discourse. Marais has referred to this ubiquity of resilience in the South African state as the “the fetish of coping.”³⁷ In fact, he denotes an additional profound quandary demonstrated in the contradictory fusion of Ubuntu and neoliberalism. Ubuntu, an African philosophical concept, calls for human principles of communitarianism, mutual assistance, and obligation based on the bonding sense of a shared humanity and wholeness. The concept became an indispensable symbol of identification for the new South Africa in the light of a united rainbow nation during the reconciliation discourse and even more in the post-Mandela era.³⁸ As respect for human dignity, solidarity, restoration, and justice are values preached by Ubuntu, it incorporates the rudimentary conditions for community-level resilience. Through continuous privatization, the state removes itself from responsibility for social life, which becomes increasingly subordinate to market forces. This discourse is in contrast to the resilience and perseverance of the altruistic Ubuntu community that takes responsibility in order for households to survive. Marais observes that “the home- and community-based care system, for instance, fits snugly in the mould of coping dogma—not least in the central roles assigned to the sphere of the home (and to women within it).”³⁹ According to Marais the female resilient subject in particular, active in South African society and specifically in a post-Marikana society, continues to practice the oxymoron of successful coping strategies. The South African woman restores continuously “a parlous and chronically insecure state of household ‘viability,’”⁴⁰ that however cannot be considered a success story. International analyses have not been silent on the particularly problematic, gendered dimensions of the costs of resilience at the level of the household carried out by women within the families. Those costs of resilience in the form of domestic labor, unpaid work, and the work of social reproduction are being “rendered invisible and compounded over time.”⁴¹ The widows of Marikana increasingly meet the demands of coping with the direct and indirect consequences of the neoliberal mind-set of “flexicurity.” Sarah Bracke has defined this as “post-feminist resilience.”⁴²

However, in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* the spectator is not confronted with the fetish of coping. On the contrary, the two South African performances entail remarkable messages in gendered-subtext by eliciting a reflection on the value of representing the daily life struggle of the mourning women against inhumanity and socioeconomic inequality in a new neoliberal South Africa. Furthermore, they explicitly expunge a denial of vulnerability. Therefore, they foreground issues such as grief and loss as “the fundamental sociality of embodied life.”⁴³ The mourning of the mother figures in *Mari and Kana* is expressed in choreography, physicality, and musicality. They throw their heads back and look up, turn their hands palms towards the sky, fall on their knees, bow, reach their hands towards the crosses. These everyday “sedimented acts,” of mourning reflect “a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.”⁴⁴

Critics argue that through its de-politicizing effects, resilience undermines every expression of resistance and stimulation of state responsibility and, hence, undermines a re-evaluation and re-conceptualization of the given world. The transformative power of accepting vulnerability lies exactly in the generation of such a rethinking process as “vulnerability suggests moral responsibilities for those in positions of power towards those who are less powerful.”⁴⁵ The focus on the intensive grief and loss expressed by the women in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* can involve such a point of departure to re-think another world and “critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others.”⁴⁶ In this respect, by calling for resistance to resilience, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama* re-politicize both the Marikana massacre itself and the precarious social arrangements of the mourning women that demand the responsibility and interrogation of politically-infused power systems and structural arrangements. In conclusion, they both provide an alternative and ambiguous approach to resilient subjects and call for resistance to resilience expressed by embodied daily practices of mourning and grief. This embodied aesthetics of vulnerability moves beyond reassuring the known and familiar but instead “pleads in favor of a logic of sensation that forces the spectator to think the yet unthought, to move beyond the solid ground of common sense and recognition.”⁴⁷

South African Widowhood

Globally seen, widows are often condemned to financially precarious living conditions due to discrimination in matters of inheritance, land, and property rights.⁴⁸ In addition to this economic impoverishment, widows in South Africa are particularly confronted with a cultural burden as widowhood involves more than merely the loss of a husband. It differs strongly from widowerhood in which widowers find themselves in a “transient phase,” while widows occupy a “liminal status.”⁴⁹ A widower is always reminded that he should and can be strong. In contrast to the widower, the widow and her “relatively frail body”⁵⁰ is primarily present to give meaning to the deceased man’s body. Considered as still being married to her deceased man, the widow stays in an ambiguous state characterized by impurity and negative beliefs. A widow is said to possess negative spirits and even to embody the cause of her own man’s death. Hence, this liminal status is expressed in variable and often ritualized customs in which the widow’s body is turned into a focal point. A widow is supposed to eat with one hand, to wear only one shoe and to shave her head. She is prohibited from leaving the house and participating in public ceremonies.

Scholars have acknowledged the beneficial effect of these often ritualized customs as it heals grief, removes bad luck or *senyama*, and consequently facilitates the integration of the widow within the community. Yet, analyzing the treatment of the South African widows in the light of the Ubuntu principles of community, Matsobane Manala points out that these customs are as well “deliberate uncaring, disrespectful, discriminatory, impolite and unjust.”⁵¹ According to Manala’s fieldwork in South Africa, many widows feel encouraged by internal and external support systems. Despite this support, he also mentions feelings of isolation and stress due to the stigmatization of widowhood and customs imposed by society. Manala concludes that widowhood in Africa is an “extremely difficult and problematic stage in women’s lives.”⁵²

Mari and Kana and *Iqhiya Emnyama* choose to stage the unsettling stories of the widows of the Marikana massacre. In consequence, they explore the role of these South African mourning women countering a neoliberal discourse that possesses a deceptive force of encapsulation. Beyond providing a critical approach toward the coping fetish in the context of structural vulnerability and social inequality, the performances elicit, through a focus on the individual daily practice of the widows, a reflection on the value and

feasibility of representing the daily life struggle of these women and the culturally stipulated aspect of their lives as widows.

Both performances are packed with mourning signifiers that refer to the daily life of a woman inhabiting the Xhosa culture. The black clothes and headscarves immediately distinguish the female performers from the audience and define them as widows. In *Iqhiya Emnyama* the dragged mattresses, central objects in the performance, refer to the domestic space to which a widow is restricted during her mourning period. Further on, the repetitive flat-handed wiping of faces and the constructed silent poses of the women, recalling photographs, remind the audience of the public silence these widows are supposed to maintain.

Certainly, in *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, the mourning women are manifestly symbolized through the customs of widowhood in Xhosa culture. But, through displaying a rupture within these customs, the performances also further the emerging criticism of these customs and question their legitimacy. Both performances present widows who share their grief publicly in the midst of what seems their mourning period. Before, we mentioned how African widows suffer from isolation due to the stigmatization of widowhood. "I must just stay at home; it means I am in prison. I am not supposed to visit any house and I cannot talk to people."⁵³ This isolation of the widows heightens the feeling of imprisonment especially because of the expulsion from their own community in the name of cultural beliefs. By staging the widows in public as mature actors, *Iqhiya Emnyama* and *Mari and Kana* challenge the cultural value of separation and isolation.

Moreover, *Iqhiya Emnyama* questions specifically the use of the black cloth. In current debates, the black cloth has been contested as a patriarchal construct of womanhood⁵⁴ along with the restriction of the women to the domestic sphere. In the middle of *Iqhiya Emnyama* the widows rip off their black clothes and confidently perform the "toyi toyi," a marching dance often performed in political protests. In this context, Mkaza-Siboto refers to the ground-breaking act of Graça Machel who spoke in public during her mourning period: "Machel was convinced that people needed her voice. So she spoke up. This is exactly what happens in *Iqhiya Emnyama*. These women navigate in the situation in which they are present."⁵⁵

The mattresses are easily interpreted by the spectator as a readable denotation of the mourning's domestic field. The performance starts with static sitting poses of the performers on the mattresses. Despite this obvious feature of the mattresses, the spectator's construction of the meaning of this object and its suggested cultural custom is destabilized as the spectator witnesses the emotionless facial expressions and robotized shifts of the performers' poses on the mattresses. The mattresses continue to represent performative objects that playfully shift meaning throughout the performance: The mattresses function as the walls of a house, as personifications of the lovers the widows dance with and make love to. But they represent also the passive government that leads the widows to rebel. The latter is visualized by running and jumping on the mattresses. As these mourning protocols are staged in multiple ways, *Iqhiya Emnyama* challenges the cultural elements that identify the mourning widow. Therefore, during the performance the constructed identity of the widows is revised. As the image of the widow is dislocated and consequently defamiliarized, it can invoke "uncomfortable parallels or fresh interpretations."⁵⁶

Both performances, *Mari and Kana* and *Iqhiya Emnyama*, show revised traditional mourning customs and play with cultural and spectators' expectations. Hence, they both enact alternative identities in a public space and facilitate a "politics of recognition," in "which the audience can recognize the humanity of the performers"⁵⁷ more than the

social construct of their widowhood. This recognition does not only produce a potential effect on the personal and social identity of the performers as widows, but it also has political repercussions. Under Butler's assertion, "for politics to take place, the body must appear;"⁵⁸ these performances provide opportunities for intrinsic mutual processes of recognition between the spectator and the performer and for this space to become political.

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